



South Central District Health

Keeping your family & community healthy

Twin Falls 734-5900 * Burley 678-8221 * Gooding 934-4477 * Hailey 788-4335 * Jerome 324-8838 * Rupert 436-7185

HEPATITIS A

What is hepatitis A?

Hepatitis A is an infection of the liver caused by a virus. Hepatitis A can range from a mild illness lasting one to two weeks to serious illness, which can require hospitalization. Some people may not get sick at all. Symptoms can include tiredness, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, and aching. Later symptoms can include dark-colored urine, light-colored stool, and jaundice (when the eyes or skin turn yellow).

What should someone who has symptoms of hepatitis A do?

See a doctor.

How is hepatitis A spread?

Hepatitis A viruses are in the intestines of a person who is infected. The viruses leave the body in a person's feces. If the infected person doesn't wash his/her hands after a bowel movement, his/her hands may be contaminated with viruses. When that person handles food, the food is contaminated with hepatitis A viruses. Whoever eats the food can then become infected. Hepatitis A is also easily spread when a person doesn't wash his/her hands after changing the dirty diapers of an infected child.

Who is susceptible?

Anyone can get hepatitis A. After being infected, a person is probably immune (protected) for life.

How long after being infected does a person first become sick?

15-50 days, usually 28-30 days.

When can someone with hepatitis A spread it to others?

One to two weeks before the first symptoms appear through one week after jaundice appears (or two weeks after first symptoms occurred).

How can the spread of hepatitis A be prevented?

- Thoroughly wash hands with soap and warm water after using the toilet or diapering children.
- Always wash hands carefully before preparing, serving, or handling food. If you have hepatitis A, do not prepare, serve, or share food with others until one week after jaundice began (or two weeks after symptoms first began).
- Work -- Food handlers, childcare workers, health care workers, and residential care workers who provide personal care should not work until they are no longer contagious. Food handlers, childcare workers, and health care workers who live in a household in which there is a case of hepatitis A should not work unless exempted by the health district.
- Childcare -- Children with hepatitis A should not attend childcare until they are no longer contagious.
- Hepatitis A vaccine is available. It is intended to be given before exposure to hepatitis A. It is not used after a person has possibly been exposed to hepatitis A.

What should someone do if they've been in close contact with a person with hepatitis A?

Household members, sex partners, and contacts in childcare settings should receive immune globulin (IG) as soon as possible, but no longer than 14 days after their most recent exposure. Only someone who has eaten ready-to-eat food handled by someone with hepatitis A is at risk of being infected. IG is not recommended for the usual office, school, or work situations. Practice good handwashing!

What is the treatment for hepatitis A?

There is no specific treatment. Treatment of symptoms and rehydration (fluid replacement) may be necessary.